

Fourth Extraordinary Consistory: Cardinal Jozef Tomko

Proclaiming Christ the world's only Saviour

The following is a précis of the address Cardinal Tomko gave at the special Consistory on 5 April.

The spread of sects and the challenge they present to the Church has theological as well as pastoral implications. Doctrinal confusion regarding the content of the faith opens the way to the proliferation of sects, to their practical justification, and above all, to a lack of commitment in pastoral care and the explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ, which establishes the Christian community.

There is a gnostic relativism and a theological misunderstanding which levels all religions, different religious experiences and beliefs, to a least common denominator in which everything is the same and each person can take an equally valid road to salvation.

There are some theological theories which empty and deform the revealed mystery of the Word Incarnate in Jesus Christ, and which arbitrarily construct the divine mystery which "is emerging", "is being incarnated" in various religious types (incarnations, saviours, mediators, revealers, founders, mystics). Once these kinds of theories are put into pastoral practice they eliminate missionary involvement and weaken Christian identity itself.

The appeals of the encyclical on missionary activity

Pope John Paul II in his last encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* wanted to reaffirm the theological basis of the Church's missionary identity and in fact to correct certain theological interpretations. He speaks of these ambiguities in general terms (cf. *RM* 2, 36) and in particular ones (cf. *RM* 6, 11, 17-18, 28-29). In these theological clarifications Jesus Christ, the only Saviour and the perfect revelation of God, is at the centre of the document. There it is affirmed that "To introduce any sort of separation between the Word and Jesus Christ is contrary to the Christian faith" (*RM* 6); that "the Kingdom of God as we know it from Revelation cannot be detached either from Christ or from the Church" (*RM* 18); that the Spirit "who blows where he wills, who was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified... is the same Spirit who was at work in the Incarnation and in the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus, and who is at work in the Church" (*RM* 29).

But what is behind these appeals of the Holy Father? It is not a matter of groundless emphases, but of clarifying and correcting certain theological theories and tendencies, which may be more widespread than one thinks at first sight.

Since Vatican II the Church has been involved in interreligious dialogue and the Magisterium's teaching during and after the Council has sought to explain the nature and basis of this dialogue. Various theologians have sought to deepen the understanding of the very foundations of this dialogue and the theological realities connected with it. The role of theologians is important and the Pope emphasizes this in the encyclical, encouraging them in the sort of work which contributes to the life and mission of the Church (*RM* 2, 36). Some, however, have developed unacceptable and destructive doctrines, which can be reduced to three principal themes: Christ, the Spirit, and the Kingdom.

A reinterpreted Jesus Christ

According to some Indian theologians, in the search for dialogue Jesus Christ does not unite, but rather, divides; unity and agreement, then, are not to be sought in 'Christocentrism', but in 'theocentrism', i.e., in the divine mystery, while the person of Jesus Christ is to be relativized.

Certainly, these theologians know well the biblical texts which present Jesus Christ as the only Saviour of humanity and as the only Mediator between God and men. They consider these texts to be later Christologies and as emphatic affirmations on the level of those made by a husband out of love for his wife.

Taking the distinction between the Christ-Logos and the historical Jesus as the point of departure, it is claimed that there is more in the Logos than in the historical Jesus, so that the Logos can appear in other religions and be hidden in other historical figures. The Christ-Logos would belong to all religions and be manifested in them. On the other hand, the historical Jesus belongs to the Christian religion and the Church. The salvific mediation of non-Christian religions is also tied to the cosmic Christ-Logos. The role of the Church, though, would be tied to the role of the historical Jesus. Certain titles such as "final, ultimate, unique, universal" are true, then, only if they are applied to the Word, but not to the historical Jesus! In conclusion, the universal mystery of salvation is accomplished *by means of all religions*.

Other theologians affirm that one cannot absolutize the model of Chalcedon or oblige Asia to make a simple translation of it. The Christological titles were given to Jesus later by particular beliefs and cultures and they are already interpretations.

Others propose a pluralistic theocentrism. Consciously or unconsciously, they not only consider the adherents of the various religions to be equal, but their contents and even their founders, who are all declared to be saviours in whom the infinite Mystery of God is at work or is historically incarnated.

To make the dialogue equal, either Jesus Christ is downgraded by silence about his divinity, or the founders of other religions are upgraded by making them almost an incarnation of God, or mediators and saviours equal to Jesus Christ.

A wandering Spirit

The theology of the Spirit is sometimes used, also, to support these theories. Some Asian theologians insist on the *universal* work of the Spirit outside the Church's limits. Some tie it to the universality of the mystery of the Christ-Logos, which is present and at work everywhere through the Spirit. Others tend to separate the activity of the Spirit from that of Christ. Both currents of thought see in the universally present and active Spirit another reason for affirming the salvific value of different religions independently of Christ.

A formless Kingdom

The Kingdom is emphasized in parallel to and in strict connection with the theories just explained, whether inclus-



ivistic or pluralistic. It is claimed that the universal, divine plan of salvation consists in promoting the *Kingdom*, shifting the focus from the Church to the Kingdom. The Kingdom thus becomes the 'new focal point' of evangelization.

What, then, is this 'Kingdom', often lacking the complement 'of God'? It would include *all religions*, which are called to build it in mutual dialogue; it would be identified with the 'new humanity' which is to unite everyone in a community of love, justice, and peace; it would be the 'welfare of humanity', a 'human liberation'. Thus, the Kingdom tends to be thought of as a 'utopia', a 'thing'.

In this way a 'kingdom-centrism' is constructed in opposition to the 'ecclesiocentrism' of the *plantatio Ecclesiae*, which is frequently renounced as obsolete and false. For example, someone writes: "The primary mission of the Church is building the Kingdom and dialogue with other religions is the means to this end. The Church is not called to build herself, but to serve... called also to die so that the world may live".

These theologians completely ignore the fact that Jesus not only announced the Kingdom, but was proclaimed the King in whom the Kingdom of God is made present. Jesus Christ in his paschal mystery gives the Kingdom its most profound and specific meaning; without him, "to speak of the kingdom is simply ideology", as L. Newbigin has noted.

Consequences for the Church's mission

The consequences are simply devastating. The scope of evangelization is reduced and distorted; the necessity of faith in Jesus Christ, of baptism and the Church, are put into doubt. "In this context of religious pluralism", an Indian theologian exclaims, "does it still make sense to proclaim Christ as the only Name in which all people are to find salvation and to call them to become disciples by means of baptism and entry into the Church?"

Evangelization in the global sense, in which the 'new focal point' is the construction of the Kingdom or of a new humanity, would consist merely of *dialogue, inculturation, and liberation*. Strangely and significantly, the message

or proclamation is omitted; such activity is even accused of being propaganda or proselytism. Evangelization is reduced to dialogue of the social type or to economic and social advancement and caste 'liberation', using all means, even violence. An Indian theologian writes about conversion: "Religious conversion is the result of western chauvinism and its intolerance. . . . Conversion originates in the sense of superiority one religion has over another, while no religion has a monopoly on the truth".

The abandonment of missionary stations, of preaching the Gospel, and of catechesis by missionaries, the clergy, and women religious, and the flight to social work, as well as the great *reductive* talk about the "values of the Kingdom" (justice, peace) is a widespread phenomenon in Asia and is propagated by some missionary centres on other continents, too.

The value of *Redemptoris Missio*

Against this background, the Holy Father's recent encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* appears not only timely but indeed providential. Anyone who has considered the first three chapters to be abstract and a rehash of well-known doctrine will have to change his mind completely. These chapters seem extremely necessary to reconfirm the Church's faith in truths which have been endangered by sketchy theories.

This letter is already an enormous help for anyone who wishes to follow the voice of the Pope. However, the problem is already so extensive and the theories expounded are spreading so rapidly that the Holy See can no longer remain passive. They are creating a serious danger for faith in Jesus Christ as professed by the Church each Sunday and feastday in the Creed and as taught by the Council of Chalcedon. Furthermore, on the practical level they are weakening the missionary spirit, reducing evangelization to mere dialogue and development, with the abandonment of proclamation, catechesis, and logically, conversions and baptisms. They strongly confirm the basis and justification of two phenomena denounced in the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*: "a widespread indifferentism" and "a religious relativism which leads to the belief that 'one religion is as good as another'" (n. 36).

If India is the epicentre of these tendencies and Asia their main territory, similar ideas are already circulating in Oceania, in some countries of Africa, and in Europe. The mission is then doubly deceived regarding the direct activity of evangelization in the missionary territories and regarding the negative influence on missionary vocations in the Churches of ancient Christianity.

The question is thus posed in total seriousness: what should be done so that the Word of God about the salvation given to us uniquely in Christ may be proclaimed in its purity, "Ut verbum Dei currat et clarificetur"?

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